

**Washington Post "Close to Home" January 14, 2001**  
**by Council President Blair G. Ewing**

The Dec. 20 editorial "Where to Put a New Bridge" argued that a new crossing over the Potomac and a new super highway miles beyond the Beltway is critical to solving our region's traffic problems.

Wrong. We need to look at the big picture -- at development patterns, land use, mass transit, demand management and road improvements.

The \$2 million that Rep. Frank Wolf has secured for a study by the Federal Highway Administration should not focus narrowly on the one option of a highway and bridge crossing but should include land-use solutions too.

Montgomery County has opposed another Montgomery County Potomac River crossing and its associated truckway because such a crossing would either slash through our agricultural reserve or steamroll densely populated residential areas. It would violate almost 30 years of master plans, upon which residents have depended when buying into their communities.

All nine members of the county council oppose a second Montgomery bridge and truckway. County Executive Doug Duncan is against it. So is the State of Maryland. In Montgomery County and elsewhere in the region, we are interested in investing in protecting precious open space, preserving quality of life and providing more transportation choices.

Updated Census figures from 1997 indicate that 92 percent of our residents work in the county, the District or other Maryland counties. Eight percent commute to Virginia, and many of those commute to Arlington, the Pentagon and points east and would not see much benefit from a more northerly bridge.

A recent report by the county's "Commission on the Future: 2000 and Beyond" voiced serious reservations about such a bridge and highway as potentially ruinous to the county's economic development. Others have suggested that this project might more accurately be called the "Dulles Airport Relief Act of 2001."

Montgomery County rightfully prides itself on its nationally recognized model of land-use planning. With the creation in 1980 of a 90,000-acre agricultural reserve and its 25-acre zoning, the county put into place a program to address the difficult issues of growth and development. With this wedge of open space and farmland in its northern half, the county chose to concentrate development along major arterials and transit lines and in its more urbanized centers.

A just-released Potomac Survey Research poll shows that Montgomery Countians overwhelmingly - by 52 percent to 32 percent -- favor mass transit over new roads to solve the region's transportation problems.

Maryland should not abandon its vision and bulldoze farms and long-established communities for a project that won't even solve traffic congestion. It's time to focus on a balanced program of road and transit improvements and wise land use on both sides of the river. It's time for regional cooperation that respects the decisions of county residents and their elected officials rather than appeases special interests.

A second Potomac River crossing and its associated truckway in Montgomery County are not going to happen. So let's put our collective energies into balanced, workable solutions that will make a difference now.

**Blair G. Ewing is president of the Montgomery County Council.**